

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE WOUNDS
OF THE LORD'S FEET, AS SEEN ON THE HOLY SHROUD

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Mons. Alfonso Paleotto was one of the prelates who accompanied St. Charles Borromeo to Turin in June of 1582, to venerate the Holy Shroud. From that time, he began to reflect on the passion of Christ as he saw it mysteriously imprinted on the Shroud; and in 1598 Paleotto, by then Archbishop of Bologna, published his book, *Espliatione del Sacro Lenzuolo Ove Fu Involto Il Signore* (Explanation of the Holy Sheet In which the Lord was wrapped). Dedicating it to the reigning pope, Clement VIII, he writes: "To his Holiness Pope Clement VIII. Finding myself, Most Holy Father, with the illustrious Cardinals Charles Borromeo and Gabrielle Paleotto when they went to Turin to visit the Holy Shroud, the foremost of all relics on account of the effigy and the form of all the body of Our Lord impressed there with his own blood; having seen a thing so admirable, I felt a burning desire to have a copy of the same measure, in order that (fixing my eyes upon it) I would impress those most holy wounds in my mind, for the salvation of my soul ... And my desire was fulfilled ... and to my hands came a copy, faithfully and diligently produced from the original. In looking upon it often, certain considerations have come to me, and some secret discoveries were clarified in this Linen; such as the quality of the wounds; of the form of the crown of thorns ..." which he describes as "a sort of cap which covered and touched all the head."

Certainly many of his observations were made at the direct viewing of the Shroud. But perhaps others were based on the "faithful copy", for in the excerpts below he tells us that on the instep of the feet, two big nail wounds are visible, whereas in fact the instep of the left foot is not, today, visible on the Shroud. Still, in an amazing degree, the observations of the XVIth century bishop—as indeed the minute descriptions of the XVIth c. Poor Clare nuns—agree with what modern science has verified. [Ed.]

Excerpted from Chapter XIX: On the Crucifixion of the Feet of Our Lord, and on the Wounds that are seen there.

Looking then at the feet on the frontal image, it appears that, having been un-nailed and placed in the Shroud, the Lord left there the imprints of his feet, which reveal two big nail wounds, visible on the instep; two big nail wounds which emerge in the soles, spouting abundant blood. And thus is verified what David said, *They have pierced my hands and my feet.*¹ Also, with great authority, the Holy Fathers teach that this prophecy is to be understood as the wounds made by nails in the hands and the feet of Our Lord. Also Zacharia predicted it, though in more general terms, saying, *They shall look upon me whom they have pierced.*² His testimony is cited by St. John in the Apocalypse, where he says, *All eyes shall look upon him whom they have pierced.*³ Also St. Thomas, St. Augustine and St. Isidore noted it, saying, *Hands and feet were infixed, for hands and feet are not pierced except in him who is suspended on the wood.*

That nailing in the sacred feet of the Lord was extremely painful, being in a part so sensitive and replete with nerves; and the Lord

revealed that great pain to St. Brigitte, saying, *I had no other support but the nails. All my insides were dried up and shrunk together, and my heart was full of sadness, for my heart is of the most sensitive and pure nature. For that reason, the pain ran, now from the nerves to the heart, now from the heart to the nerves; so that my pain grew, and death stayed his hand.* And St. Bernard, speaking of these same nails, said that they made a great outcry for the pain they caused, when he says, *The nail cries out, the wound cries out, because God in Christ is reconciling the world with himself.*

But seeing the two feet separated on the Holy Shroud, with the nail-holes on the instep of the feet, it is not clear if each of the feet had its nail, so that the Lord was nailed with four nails, as it seems that St. Cyprian would have it, naming the nails of the feet in the plural, saying, *With the nails which transpierced his sacred feet;* and Gregory Turonese and St. Brigitte saying, *With two nails his feet were fixed to the wood of the cross.* The very savant Cardinal Toledo also considered the number of four more probable, along with many other moderns, who deduce it from the number of soldiers who crucified Christ and divided his clothing in four parts, to each soldier his part. And with some probability one could judge that Our Lord was pleased with this mysterious quaternary, according to what St. Paul considers the four directions of the Cross, when he says, *So that you can understand, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and depth and height.*⁴ This passage is considered by St. Augustine to be the four aspects of the Cross; and not him only, but St. Cyril, Rupert and St. Anselme declare that by these four parts they understand that Christ, by the Cross, had to encompass the universe, divided in four parts. Furthermore, Jansenius says that the division of the clothing signifies the four parts of the world, brought to the faith in virtue of Christ's passion. And Sedulius, in the same quaternary, sees the purchase of the universe, for he says, *Therefore he gathers the four parts of the world.*

Others, however, are better pleased with the number of three nails, as St. Gregory Nazianzen, saying, *Affixed to the wood with three nails,* and St. Bonaventure, saying, *Those three nails supported the weight of the whole body;* and St. Anselme and Nonius saying, *With one large and single nail they transfixed both feet, one over the other.* Among the moderns, Sigonius and Tostatus consider that since both the Lord's feet were fixed with one single nail, he suffered more pain because the nail had to be very thick, and that foot which was over the other was tortured more, having received the larger wound, and also because the nail is bigger at the upper end; as in fact we see, on the Holy Shroud, one foot has a larger wound than the other and is also more damaged than the other, having received, perhaps, a blow of the hammer. And this opinion is even more probable, since commonly one sees, on the crucifixes, one foot nailed over the other. However, evidence from the Holy Shroud does not clarify if the Lord was crucified with three or four nails. In any event, the pious reader will consider the pain of the Lord in those feet according to the spirit that

God suggests, meditating the Lord crucified, now with three nails, now with four.

One of these nails was put in the bridle of the Emperor Constantine's horse by St. Helen, his mother; so that this nail would protect Constantine in battle, as one learns from history. St. Ambrose also testifies to it, and with him all the company of the ecclesiastic historians, such as Ruffino, Niceforo, Sozomeno and Theodorito. In fact, concerning this nail placed in Constantine's bridle, many believe that it refers to Zacharia's prophecy, where he says, *In that day it will come to pass that the horse's bridle is consecrated to the Lord.*⁵

Excerpted from chapter VII: Of the Wounds in the Soles of the Lord's Feet, which are seen on the Holy Shroud; and the Manner to Meditate the Wounds impressed there.

Beginning, then, with the wounds that are seen on the Holy Shroud in the sacred soles of the Lord's feet, which are seen to be pierced with nails and full of blood, one perceives the verification of Isaiah's prophecy, *From the soles of the feet to the top of his head, there is no place left intact: but wounds and bruises and running sores; which have not closed up, nor been bound up, nor received emollient oil.*⁶ Job was the figure of this, smitten by Satan with terrible sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head.⁷ These sacred wounds, so lacerated for love of us, demonstrate the inestimable steadfastness of his spirit, and confirm the truth of the words the Lord gave to the angels, saying, *I have trodden the winepress alone.*⁸ Which means, in stomping the grapes of human affliction, my own feet were in the winepress, and together with the juice of the grapes, the blood of my wounds gushed out. God did not want that this blood should be absorbed by the earth, but willed that it should remain impressed on the Holy Shroud, so that the prophecy of Job would be fulfilled, *O Earth, do not cover my blood,*⁹ because it deserves to be preserved in the place where, as blood of the Redeemer, it could be honored with the same adoration of !atria that the faithful give to the sacred wood of the Cross. As David the prophet says, *We will adore the place where your feet have been.*

How great was the pain of the Lord, so torn in the soles of his feet, where all the nerves are located; for nerves spread through all the parts of the body in natural harmony, and when one part suffers, then all the members are tortured, as Job predicted, saying, *Now my pain oppresses me and all my limbs are reduced to nothing.*¹⁰ And David, foreseeing that those sacred feet would have to shed blood so copiously that wherever he stepped he not only left bloody footprints, but it seemed that those feet were immersed in blood; there where he says, *Soak your foot in blood.*¹¹ So in the Holy Linen, that part of the foot fulfills the prophecy.

And this gives us courage to remain strong so that we can do combat with the ancient serpent who always strikes at the heel... And if the Romans used images of their ancestors to stimulate themselves to virtue and to fire themselves to imitation by the constant memory of

those who went before as Quinto Massimo, Publius and Scipione were wont to say, that if they wished to rouse the mind to virtue, they looked upon the images of their betters. And when we contemplate the Holy Shroud, and gaze upon the figure of Our Lord and Savior Jesus; and consider the resoluteness of those sacred feet, all bloody as they are; should not we, much more than the Romans, take courage to remain strong and upright in the battles of this life?

REFERENCES

1. Psa. 22:16
2. Zach. 12:10
3. Jo. 19:37 and Apo. 1:7
4. Ephe. 3:18.
5. Zach. 14:20. Modern translations of this verse give the word "bell" instead of bridle. In the Vulgate of Paleotto's day [edition of Sixtus V, sanctioned by Clement VIII] the word was bridle: *In die illa erit quod super fraenum equi est sanctum Domino*. One notices variant readings also in other citations.
6. Isa. 1:6
7. Job 2:7
8. Isa. 63:3
9. Job 16:18
10. Job 16:7
11. Psa. 68:23